A History of Modern Wales 1536–1990

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A HISTORY OF MODERN WALES

In preparation

A History of Medieval Wales
Huw Pryce

A History of
Modern Wales
1536–1990

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Contents

Contents

Part Four – Modern Wales

List of Maps

List of Tables

Preface

Writing a general history of any nation over a lengthy period is a foolhardy venture, and choosing terminal dates is particularly difficult. Given the ancient continuity of the Welsh nation, it seems inappropriate to begin an account at any point after the Roman occupation. It is especially difficult to understand the impact of the Tudor reforms in Church or State without knowing the late medieval background, at least as far back as the Glyndŵr rising; so beginning this history in the 1530s may appear eccentric or inconvenient. On the other hand, the present book has to be seen as the second of a pair of complementary volumes, which between them will describe the history of Wales from earliest times to the present.

This book is meant to be suitable for readers without any previous knowledge of Welsh history, though it is hoped that it might also be of value for those who already have some background. The general nature of the book means that references have not been provided quite so abundantly as in a more technical work; and it should be noted that chapter twenty, 'Historical Writing in Wales' serves a multiple purpose. In addition to exploring the traditions of Welsh historiography and offering suggestions for further reading, the chapter also lists the sources that have been consulted in writing the book.

Names and dates

Welsh place names pose a particular problem. There was for example an ancient region known as Meirionydd, which was anglicised to 'Merioneth', and gave its name to the later shire. The tendency in

reent years has been to return to the older Welsh forms, which are seen as more 'authentic', and where such forms are not available, they are invented. 'Merionethshire' is now part of the modern parliamentary constituency of Meirionydd Nant Conwy, while the borough of Aberavan is known as *Aberafan*.

This issue of linguistic purity attracts remarkable passions, but it is difficult to share the enthusiasm. One could for example refer throughout to *Sir Gaernarfon*, but from the sixteenth century to the twentieth, the county was 'Caernarvonshire'; and a form like 'Caernarfonshire' is a monstrous hybrid. (The present writer has even seen instances where the English peers are described as the 'Earls of Caernarfon'!) It would be bizarre for an English-language text to refer to Swansea as *Abertawe*, Cardiff as *Caerdydd* or Newport as *Casnewydd*. Why then apply a different principle to lesser places with equally well-established names? We might spell the name of the Monmouthshire town as *Blaenau*, though its residents have always known it as Blaina, and that is the name used here. Similarly for Llantwit Major (*Llanilltud Fawr*) or Holywell (*Treffynnon*).

Perfect consistency is not claimed, but this book tends to follow the traditional English usage, as represented in the Ordnance Survey maps of the 1960s – before the outbreak of linguistic 'correctness'. In the south and borders especially, this has the virtue of following local usage.

All dates before 1752 are old-style, except that the year is taken as beginning on January 1.

To Liz
Catherine and Alexandra

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CHAPTER ONE

Introductory: Which Wales?

For a thousand years, English and other writers have been in no doubt of the existence of a distinctive Welsh people, originally demarcated by language, but also by real or alleged ethnic traits. The Welsh were strongly attached to their homeland, which at various times had a separate political identity. In 1536, Henry VIII's Act of Union spoke of a 'dominion, principality and country of Wales'; a century later, Milton assumed that the Council in the Marches exercised control over 'an old, and haughty nation proud in arms'. But exactly what was this nation?

The land of Wales is clearly defined as a political entity, comprising the 13 traditional counties formed under the Tudors, and reorganised in 1974 into eight new units.[1] Beyond this, almost any statement about 'Welshness' or the nature of Wales is likely to be controversial. In history and social science, it is common to use phrases that seem to assume clear distinctions within the geographical unit. One area might be 'more Welsh', while another is part of the 'anglicised lowlands'; and language is only one factor in this division. This makes it appear that there exists an ideal 'true Wales', *pura Wallia*, which different regions can resemble to a greater or lesser degree. On the other hand, a survey of the modern history of Wales suggests a more complex picture. Within the small area of Wales, there are important regional and cultural distinctions, and it is a matter of debate whether any one region or cultural pattern can claim a greater correctness or authenticity. These divisions have provided an essential context to the development of every aspect of Welsh life, especially in matters of politics and religion.

1. Except where otherwise stated, 'Wales' will be taken to refer to the thirteen historic counties, including Monmouthshire.

1

A WELSH NATION?

Can we speak of 'Wales' as anything more than an expression of geographical convenience? Henry VIII had officially snuffed out any legal distinctions or peculiarities that Wales might formerly have possessed, leaving a mere component of England, 'incorporated, united and annexed'. Does 'Wales' mean anything more than a term like 'East Anglia' or 'Wessex', both geographical terms that preserve distant recollections of ancient statehood?

It is useful here to compare the experience of the three Celtic nations that would ultimately form part of the United Kingdom. Scotland, Ireland and Wales were all inhabited by people of largely Celtic stock, and in all three, there were substantial populations speaking Celtic languages. When that has been said, we have exhausted the common Celticity of the three societies. Of the three, Wales is the least understood by English historians, perhaps precisely because it was less visibly alien than Scotland or Ireland. The two latter countries were undeniably foreign in their social makeup. Scotland was clearly a different society, with its traditions of Roman law and feudalism; and the establishment of the Presbyterian religion for most of the period. The Scottish highlands were the home of a Gaelic society strongly derived from ancient Celtic traditions; but the Lowlands too demonstrated social and political features that left no doubt that this was a distinct national culture. Ireland was shaped by the conflict of race, religion and language, and was ruled by a colonial framework very different from England. In neither was language the sole criterion of identity: no rational observer would use the scarcity of Gaelic speech to justify calling Glasgow an 'anglicised' city; still less Dublin.

Yet in Wales, it was the Welsh language that gave the country what unity it possessed. As we will see, Welsh survived remarkably well through the political changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Wales entered the years of industrial revolution with perhaps 80 or 90 per cent of its people using Welsh as the normal medium of communication. Language was a substantial distinguishing mark, but it corresponded little with social or legal arrangements; and the vexed question of defining Wales politically meant that linguistic unity was not transformed into activism.

The lack of national unity was not counteracted by centralising institutions, either administrative or religious. Unlike Scotland, Wales had never been united under a Welsh kingdom or government – with the possible exception of short-lived conditions in the

thirteenth century, or the time of the Glyndŵr rising. In early modern times, a Council of Wales and the Marches survived until 1689, but this impinged little on the everyday affairs of any section of Welsh society after 1640. There was a Welsh Great Sessions, used by judges as a forum for presenting their views on society and politics; but it never produced a glittering local bar with its attendant culture, on the lines of Georgian Dublin or Edinburgh. In education, there was from Tudor times something like a Welsh 'University College'; but this was Jesus College, Oxford, rather than any local institution.

REGIONS

Early modern Wales therefore lacked most of the characteristic features of nationhood, even those of a nation in subjection. Moreover, one of the most obvious and powerful facts about Wales in this era was the force of regionalism. It may seem remarkable to apply such a concept to such a small territory, but geography and communications made such local divisions quite inevitable. One of the most powerful and persistent of these themes was the distinction between north and south Wales, a separation recognised by many administrative devices. The division seemed obvious after the Acts of Union, which created 12 Welsh counties (Monmouthshire was detached): what could be more natural than to create two symmetrical halves, each with six shires? In the early modern period, each region had its own Vice-Admiral, its own structure for the collection of taxes and excise; while legislation in the interregnum clearly saw the two halves as separate missionary territories.

But the administrative division between north and south also reflects fundamental geographical factors, based above all on ease of transport and communication. The civil war in Wales involved two distinct and barely related series of campaigns. In more recent times, schemes for national structures in Wales generally envisaged a twin structure for north and south. The Methodist seminaries of the nineteenth century were established at Bala in Merionethshire and Trefecca in Breconshire. In the 1870s, most schemes for the proposed University of Wales suggested twin colleges, on the model originally proposed by Owain Glyndŵr. The location of the national eisteddfod alternates between north and south.

Wales was in fact an agglomeration of different societies and

regions, and there was no urban centre to unite disparate areas. Wales had no natural capital, and until the mid-eighteenth century, the largest centres were market towns with populations of about three thousand. The only administrative centre of substance was Ludlow, the headquarters of the Council under the Tudors and Stuarts. Without a Welsh city, the country's regions looked towards metropolitan centres across the border. Roughly, there were three regions, which had little contact with each other. Even less promising for any prospect of national development, these regions were defined and maintained in terms of English towns and trading patterns.

For north Wales, the vital capitals were Chester, and later Liverpool, while even Dublin was more familiar than any southern Welsh town. In the south, Bristol played a similar role as the centre of commerce, finance and social life. It acted as a real metropolis, an urban centre that drew into its orbit the surrounding counties of England as well as the shires of the south Wales coast. Shrewsbury was the regional capital for mid-Wales, and it dominated the crucial woollen industry. The three-fold division of Wales was reinforced by the nature of roads within the principality. There were traditionally three great roads. One led from Chester to Caernarvon; one from Hereford to Brecon and Carmarthen, and thence to St David's. A third was the southern coastal route, through Cardiff and Swansea. The glaring inadequacies of most road transport in Wales put a premium on coastal traffic, where the routes also radiated from Bristol and Chester.

Marriages and social contacts occurred within such a metropolitan area, rather than on a 'Welsh' basis. Obviously, it was the upper ranks of society who tended to look further afield for marriage partners; but this suggests little awareness of a Welsh context. In Monmouthshire or Glamorgan, no gentry family in the century after 1660 formed a marriage alliance with anyone from the six counties of north Wales. By contrast, there were dozens of such links with the squires and ladies of Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. Squires of Caernarvonshire and Denbighshire were equally close to the gentry communities of Cheshire or Staffordshire.

Over the years, this naturally meant that landed estates in Wales tended to pass to owners from elsewhere within these larger Anglo-Welsh regions. Thus we find Bagots and Pagets among the gentry of north Wales, Wyndhams in the south. In landowners' correspondence of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we rarely find any suggestion of acquaintance with other Welsh families beyond the

adjacent county. In contrast, they were part of widespread networks in England, within the wider metropolitan region. Below the level of the gentry, Bristol, Shrewsbury and Chester were the indispensable market towns, centres for trade, recreation or shopping; and marriage ties or migration often followed social contacts. The early industrialisation of south Wales was financed by capital from Bristol; the north looked to Cheshire and Lancashire.

These trends were accentuated rather than reduced by the improving communications of the nineteenth century. Major railways ran from east to west, and the vital communication routes of this era were three rail lines running westwards from Newport, Shrewsbury and Chester. These facilities provided the basis for growth in communications and urbanisation, but again these developments were conditioned by the needs of the English metropolitan regions. Tourism from the English midlands and north-west created a holiday coast from Conway to Prestatyn, which in turn permitted the emergence of urban centres like Llandudno and Colwyn Bay. Naturally enough, these new towns looked east to the English heartland, rather than south into Wales. By the nineteenth century, Liverpool had become perhaps the greatest Welsh city of all: the culmination of a trend at least as old as the middle ages.

COUNTIES AND HUNDREDS

These economic regions can be seen as the essential building blocks which made up the Welsh nation; but other views are possible. For a Welsh person living in, say, 1700, there were other units which might be taken to mark the boundaries of life and experience, and 'Wales' was probably not one of them. As we have seen, there were rudimentary 'national' institutions like Jesus College, but these were as nothing in prestige or significance besides those of the county. The Welsh county might have been an upstart creation of the 1530s, but it rapidly acquired real significance.

Quarter Sessions, the county Bench and lieutenancy, the Grand Jury – all were county events and institutions, deciding issues central to the life of the landed community, of clergy and burgesses, and to the making of policies that affected virtually everyone within the shire. Even the 'Welsh' Great Sessions manifested themselves as a county event, when the assizes were the scene of local pageantry and festivities; and the assize sermon was a high point of local

ecclesiastical society. The power of the county is also suggested by negative evidence, in that religious and political dissent grew on the fringes of the shires, far from the agents of justice. In the seventeenth century, the greatest Jesuit centre stood on the boundary between the shires of Monmouth and Hereford; while the headquarters of one widespread Baptist network was at Rhydwilym, on the frontier between Pembroke and Carmarthen. In this sense, the experience of Welsh people in the early modern period was essentially identical to those of their English neighbours.

But we can refine our vision still further. Wales was made up of fundamentally different economic regions. Each region comprised different counties; and furthermore, even the county might be too gross a unit for accurate perception or analysis. Most counties included at least two sharply distinct regions that were physically separated by only a few miles, though they were sharply demarcated by economy, population structure, social arrangements and sometimes language. One region might be 'anglicised', another 'pure Welsh'. Each had its own community, often with natural linkages lying beyond the official boundaries.

Even the island county of Anglesey, which seems to have the best-defined natural boundaries, has in its southern tier a very distinctive social and economic unit: the hundreds of Menai and Dindaethwy are strongly linked to the northern coastal strip of Caernarvonshire to form a 'Menai region'. Again in Caernarvonshire, the eastern part of the county was sharply differentiated from the western regions of Llŷn and Eifionydd. Denbighshire politics were long shaped by the need to reconcile the divergent interests of eastern and western halves, with their respective capitals at Wrexham and Denbigh. In Glamorgan, the river Ogwr marked the internal border between east and west. The central government had to exercise care in allotting patronage so that neither region felt slighted.

Which territorial area best defined people's awareness? Even for the greater gentry like the Mansells and Mostyns, their correspondence suggests that the truly local community was an area within a radius of only five to ten miles around the great house: that is, well below the scope of the county. Between the parish and the county was the hundred, an often neglected unit that fitted rather well with Welsh realities. Hundreds were rarely formed in a wholly arbitrary way under Henry VIII. They usually followed some traditional Welsh boundaries, or else the model of a feudal lordship, and their limits were often natural frontiers. In northwest Wales, the hundreds

were usually the ancient commotes; while in the south, a special commission decided boundaries under Henry VIII. In Pembroke-shire, the hundreds followed the old cantref boundaries, with finer divisions being drawn according to manors and lordships rather than parishes. In the whole of Wales and Monmouthshire, there were 90 hundreds with an average size of about 89 square miles. The average hundred in the later seventeenth century had about 4500 people, rising to 6500 in 1801. For the historian, it is the hundreds which perhaps offer the most manageable units for examining the diversity of local communities and cultures.

To illustrate the distinctions in social structure, let us briefly compare two hundreds within the single county of Glamorgan: Ogmore in the lowland 'Vale', and the upland area of Llangyfelach.[2] Both hundreds had similar populations in the seventeenth century – Ogmore had three thousand people, Llangyfelach closer to 3600 – and both used Welsh as their normal means of communication. (English had made somewhat more progress in Ogmore, but it was not a dominant force until the later eighteenth century). Neither had a town or city of any size, though both stood near moderate market towns: Swansea in the west, Cowbridge in the Vale. Both had coastlines, though neither had a major port; and major roads passed through both.

The two hundreds were separated by barely 20 miles, but in social structure they were different worlds. Llangyfelach was a hilly area with a pastoral-industrial economy, and from about 1700 it was a prominent centre of rapid industrialisation. Most of Ogmore depended on mixed agriculture, and was little affected by industry. The economic contrast was clearly reflected in social stratification. In 1670, the hundred of Llangyfelach had at most four gentry by customary English standards of wealth or income, while 90 per cent of the people lived in houses of one or two hearths. The largest house in the hundred had only six hearths, and no family had an income in excess of £300. However, there were many other people who were viewed as gentlemen by local and traditional standards. They often acted as leaders of the community in struggles with the feudal lords, the Dukes of Beaufort; who in turn condemned these 'Welch ragamuffins'. Llangyfelach fits closely with the experience of upland societies throughout Europe as portrayed by scholars like Braudel: this was a world of poor clergy, religious dissidence, weak

2.   The hundred of Ogmore was the survival of an old lordship which included a separate and sparsely populated upland 'Welshry'. I have excluded this anomaly from the figures presented here.

political control, a variety of economic resources, and (above all) an absence of landed nobility.

By contrast, Ogmore was a wealthy gentry-dominated society. In 1670, about 80 per cent of people lived in houses of one or two hearths. At the other extreme were 16 or so gentry families, several living in houses with ten or more hearths. The richest magnate was Sir Edward Stradling with seats at St Donats Castle (30 hearths) and Merthyr Mawr (13). There were probably eight families in the hundred with incomes in excess of £500, and these would certainly have been recognised as gentry by any contemporary English observer. By the nineteenth century, the area was dominated by the Earls of Dunraven, with their seat at Dunraven Castle.

The presence or absence of a gentry decides the means by which historians can study that area. History is shaped by the nature and availability of sources, and the attitudes of historians attracted to that kind of material. In Ogmore, the gentry have left abundant estate records and correspondence, and our historical view is a story of squires, ladies, castles, and 'high' politics. Llangyfelach strikes us through the institutions and facilities that tended to leave their records there, and it thus appears to be a land of nonconformist chapels, copper-works and coal mines. Tourists and travellers went to Ogmore as a haven of the picturesque, and their records provide much evidence of social life and landed society. They went *through* Llangyfelach, usually cursing its roads and gradients. Through the nature of the sources alone, one area appears much more like the Welsh stereotype than does the other.

Differences between the regions could be listed at length. In the seventeenth century, there were usually five or so resident Justices to administer the hundred of Ogmore. The local houses of St Donats, Dunraven and Ewenni were generally represented on the Bench and the lieutenancy, as well as in most parliaments from 1550 to 1800. By contrast, the political history of Llangyfelach can be written in terms of negatives, in discussing the offices they did not hold. Except during the interregnum, men from this hundred never served as Members of Parliament, and rarely as Justices or lieutenants. A few individuals made an impact during the 1650s, but that was precisely what made this a 'revolutionary' decade. Giving power to families like these, from a region like this, was almost as subversive in county terms as regicide was to the nation as a whole. Ogmore politics tended to be shades of Toryism, characterised by an extremist streak of high royalism, Jacobitism and nonjuror sympathies. Llangyfelach hundred was more often Whiggish, with

strong evidence of the survival of ideas and sympathies from the republican years.

Ogmore and the many areas like it were far more tightly controlled than an upland region like Llangyfelach, in religious affairs as much as secular. Twelve parishes occupied the 36 square miles of the southern portion of Ogmore, where parishes often coincided with villages. Each parish had a clergyman, or at least a vicar residing nearby. In 1763, there were eight resident clergy in the hundred, with two more living elsewhere in the county: excellent figures for Georgian Wales. There was virtually no tradition of religious dissent before 1780, and no meeting house for most of the eighteenth century. There were never more than 20 nonconformists out of 3000 people.

Llangyfelach, naturally, was different. An area larger than Ogmore, it was covered by only four parishes, and decentralised settlement made ecclesiastical supervision as difficult as secular control. In the century after 1660, this was a heartland of nonconformity, with Anglican clergy regularly estimating the number of dissenters at 20 to 30 per cent of the people. In the seventeenth century, the hundred produced Puritan soldiers like Philip Jones and clergy like Marmaduke Matthews. The eighteenth century chapels had a flourishing intellectual life, but one wholly removed from the assumptions of the established Church.

It would be over-simple to equate gentry dominance with Tory and Anglican views. An area could be as tightly controlled as Ogmore, and yet its rulers might vary greatly in political outlook. Indeed, one interesting point that emerges from intra-county studies is the existence of distinct elites and gentry communities within the county whole, made separate by family ties, economic interest and political outlook. In perhaps the most extreme case, in Monmouthshire, the contrast was not between gentry and non-gentry hundreds, but between two distinct gentries, one high Tory with Catholic sympathies, the other Whiggish and friendly to dissent. Both the hundreds of Raglan and Caldicot were in a sense 'Ogmore'-type hundreds, with well-established gentry; but the rivalry and indeed enmity between the two was intense.

In terms of historical stereotypes, Llangyfelach and Ogmore seem like separate and rival nations rather than regions. Llangyfelach is quintessentially 'Welsh': a land of democratic and independent freeholders and industrial workers, nonconformists owing little respect to squire or parson. Ogmore represents a type of social structure far different from what is usually perceived as the Welsh

9

norm, almost a piece of Somerset mistakenly appended to Wales; but it is not perhaps as exceptional as it may appear.

Call them what we may – part of 'Anglo-Wales', manorial Wales, or whatever – hundreds like Ogmore formed a significant part of the country. There were many such odd regions of mixed agriculture, often on the banks of a great river like the Clwyd, Severn, Wye or Tywi. There would sometimes be a gentry on the English pattern; and social relations revolved around a great house on the familiar model. It is not difficult to find these areas of manor houses, nucleated villages and great medieval churches, as in the Vale of Clwyd, the border country of Flintshire and eastern Denbighshire; the eastern fringes of Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire; the southern parts of Glamorgan, Monmouthshire and Pembrokeshire. Perhaps 20 Welsh hundreds, over a fifth of the total, represented this 'untypical' Ogmore pattern.

The terms used for such zones are themselves of interest, as we tend to describe them as 'anglicised', or even English. Historically, this has a little justification, as the prosperous lowland hundreds had been profoundly influenced by patterns of landownership and agriculture derived from England, from the villa society of Roman times to the manorial practices introduced by the Anglo-Normans. But these 'English' regions had social arrangements quite as authentic and long-grown as many upland areas. It is only in retrospect that they have been denaturalised by changing concepts of Welshness and nationhood. Far from being alien, such areas were for many years the centres of wealth, power and influence within Wales. To a remarkable extent, the great houses of these areas were the vital centres of Welsh literature and scholarship.

INDUSTRIALISATION

Early modern Wales was therefore marked by important regional distinctions: the principality and the march; the regions of the English metropolises; pastoral uplands and arable lowlands. Some of these divisions are ancient, but the coming of industry after 1700 created a new and starker fracture. Before this point, there were certainly areas of Wales that were more wealthy and populous than others, but no one county stood out as strongly dominant. From the Industrial Revolution, however, the south-eastern shires of Glamorgan and Monmouth did take the lead, to such an extent that we

might almost talk of two distinct nations. The enormous disparity in population can be illustrated by this table:

Table 1:1 The Growth of Regional Disparities in Population

Region	Population (thousands) in:		
	1670	*1801*	*1901*
Gwynedd	62(16.5)	106(18)	225(11.1)
Clwyd	63(16.8)	100(17)	213(10.6)
Powys	78(20.7)	100(17)	132(6.6)
Dyfed	89(23.7)	167(28.3)	284(14.1)
south-east	84(22.3)	117(19.8)	1157(57.5)
(Glamorgan and Gwent)			

(Figures in parentheses give the proportion of the total population of Wales living in each region)

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the population of Wales was fairly evenly distributed between the various regions. In the nineteenth century, the two south-eastern counties began to assume massively greater importance. They represented about 20 per cent of the population in 1801, 33 per cent by 1851, and 57.5 per cent by 1901. Since 1921, the proportion of Welsh people living in these two counties has fluctuated between 60 and 65 per cent of the whole. In the mid-nineteenth century, there also began to be urban centres' in the south, at Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil. In the twentieth century, the first three of these have all come to exceed 100,000 people, providing the urban development so conspicuously lacking in earlier centuries. Alongside 'Welsh Wales', therefore, we now find 'American Wales', the land of the booming polyglot metropolitan centres. Nor have subsequent depressions erased the division. In 1990, Wales had 38 Members of Parliament, 23 of whom represented seats in the historic shires of Glamorgan and Monmouth. And under the 1974 government reorganisation, four of the eight new counties were within the borders of the old south-eastern giants.
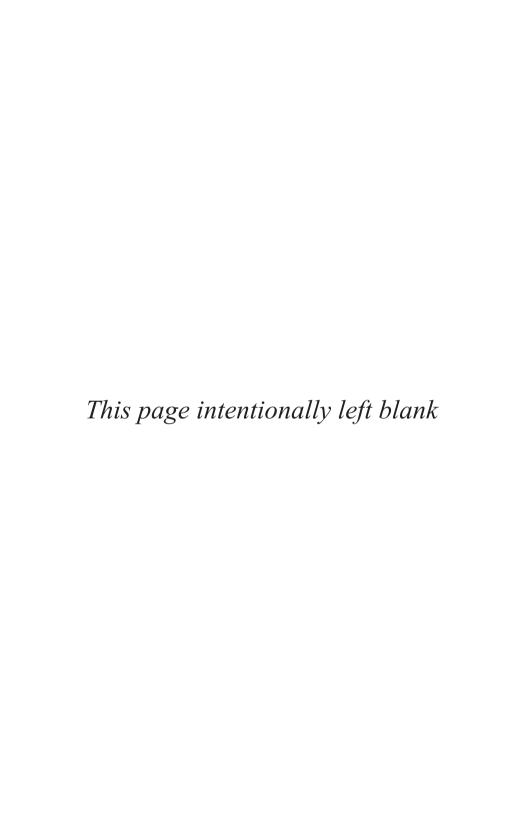
IN QUEST OF WALES

It has always been difficult to define Welshness or the Welsh nation in such a way as to take account of these regional factors. Problems of definition have become acute since the widespread decline of the

11

Welsh language, which has also accentuated older regional divisions. In fact, some would argue that 'true' Wales might be confined to only a part of geographical Wales, perhaps a very small portion of that territory. This issue might be illustrated from a remark of the nineteenth century radical MP, Henry Richard, who used the cultural 'Welshness' of the common people as a rhetorical weapon against the Anglican and Anglophone social elite. For Richard, the Welsh speakers and nonconformists of Wales could say to 'this small propertied class': 'We are the Welsh people and not you'. In other words, Welshness was to be defined by language, culture and religion, as opposed to birth or heredity. This would be a powerful idea in the present century, and it is strong today among nationalists and Welsh-language activists.

But who were the 'Welsh people' of Richard's phrase? About 1910, there were 2.4 million people in Wales, of whom 40 per cent were Welsh speakers, and 23 per cent were dissenting communicants. About a fifth of the total population lived in the 'core', those counties of the north and west where at least 80 per cent of people spoke Welsh, and 40 per cent or more were nonconformists. These were the shires of Anglesey, Caernarvon, Merioneth, Cardigan and Carmarthen, and they would long retain their identity as a heart of 'Welshness'. Richard's generalisation about the people of Wales would seem to have considerable force here, and this area would also fit the Welsh stereotype of a remote and pastoral nation. In the 1970s, radical defenders of the language sought to create here the *Bro*, a Welsh monoglot bastion.

But if this was the true Wales, what became of the rest of 'geographical' Wales? Against the five 'heartland' shires, we might set the five counties where in 1910 the proportion of Welsh speakers was under 40 per cent, and where dissenters made up less than 25 per cent of the population. These counties – Glamorgan, Monmouth, Flint, Radnor and Brecon – included the economic heartland of Wales; and this 'Anglo-Welsh' area included four times as many residents as the heartland. If the Welsh language and dissent are taken as the touchstones of Welshness, then most modern history in Wales was simply not 'Welsh'; an insupportable paradox. By the 1980s, the proportion of Welsh speakers in the country as a whole had fallen to little more than a fifth, and the decline in the south-east had been precipitous. Even in the *Bro*, the number of Welsh speakers had fallen closer to 70 per cent. Does Wales still exist? Did it ever?

A historian therefore has to give due attention to the diverse social and cultural strands that make up the fabric of Welsh history. The

modern writer must also understand the origins of the powerful historical traditions that have tried to define 'Welshness' in their different ways. Over the centuries, it has been argued that true Welshness was expressed in resistance to the Protestant Church establishment; in monarchist enthusiasm; or in nonconformist Liberalism. Each of these contradictory claims has been buttressed · with a sizeable historical literature, to claim the past in the interests of whatever cause is currently at issue. We will therefore find Welsh history littered with the products of centuries of myth-making, and it is only in recent years that many of the most cherished tales have been accorded their proper value. The new maturity and insight that have characterised Welsh historical study in the last three decades have been reflected by diligent attention to this work of reassessment; though much still remains to be done.

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PART ONE
Welsh Society

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Early Modern Society

Wales is a land of barely 8000 square miles, which had perhaps 400,000 people in 1700 (see appendix at end of this chapter). Five of the 13 shires had populations below 25,000, a level paralleled among English counties only by Westmorland and Huntingdonshire. Even these unimpressive levels were recorded at the end of a period of rapid growth. In 1500, the population was only some 200,000, probably little more than before the Black Death. This figure then began a steep rise, to perhaps 230,000 in 1550, 317,000 in 1601, and to almost 400,000 by 1650: estimates vary considerably.

Of course, there were major fluctuations within these limits, but the general direction was clear. Between 1540 and 1640, the average rate of increase was 6.3 per cent per decade; though between 1561 and 1586, growth exceeded 10 per cent in each decade, almost equal to the extraordinary rates achieved during the nineteenth century. Growth was especially rapid in Gwynedd under the Tudors and early Stuarts, reflecting the colonisation of new lands. The rate of increase then slowed after the civil war years, and the early eighteenth century figure may well have fallen below that of 1650. The pace of growth soon resumed. The population was about 480,000 in 1750, and it can reliably be fixed around 587,000 in 1801.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Wales has survived as a distinctive linguistic and cultural entity despite immediate proximity to expansive and often hostile neighbours. At its broadest point, it is little more than 100 miles from the

English border to the western sea, but that short distance includes some forbidding and inaccessible territory. The country is a protuberance from western Britain which features at its heart a rugged central upland massif. About 60 per cent of the country is above the 500 foot level, and a quarter is over 1000 feet. The Cambrian mountains cover some two-thirds of the area of Wales, and in the north they rise to steep peaks. In the centre and south, the range becomes flatter, and it is characterised by large plateaux cut deeply by valleys. In this Welsh heartland, the uplands are marked by 'rich pastures, grassy plains, and forbidding bogs', where mean annual rainfall exceeds 60 inches. For much of the period covered by this book, the Welsh mountains were regarded by most outsiders as undesirable – in fact, repulsive – countryside. Defoe in the 1720s exhausted his vocabulary of horror and disgust on the relatively slight hills of south Wales, and could find no words adequate to describe a monstrosity like Cader Idris. Not until the late eighteenth century would tourists begin to see positive features in such a landscape.

This monstrous heart would for centuries be the preservation of Wales and its language, but of course, Wales was more than hills. Around the mountainous core are a number of lowland regions of varying fertility and prosperity, including important coastal plains and river valleys. In addition, this small land has over 600 miles of coastline, offering abundant opportunities for trade and communication; but also presenting the threat of seaborne incursions. To understand the nature of Wales, we must therefore begin with the mountains; but we must also appreciate the other regions clustering around the fringes of the mountains like islands around an ocean.

The geographical contrast would have powerful social implications, as the upland areas so often provided the basis for dismissive accounts of Welsh backwardness and poverty. Pre-industrial Wales is thus seen as an isolated and primitive backwater. It was 'a pastoral economy, freckled with sleepy market towns' and some industrial villages; '. . . the province was in the hands of a native hayseed squirearchy'.[1] This picture of remoteness and stagnation is by no means a modern invention. Many English writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have left accounts which support this view of a benighted and impoverished land, isolated from the civilised (that is, English) world by its Celtic speech. Of course, this critique had in part a political and religious bias, as Anglican Tory Wales was

1. Roy Porter, *English society in the eighteenth century* (Penguin 1982).

thus stigmatised for its apparently backward and superstitious loyalism. When Methodist and Evangelical movements arose, they found useful this characterisation of the *ancien régime*. The portrayal of Wales as primitive also appealed to later Romantics, delighted to find noble savages and unspoiled landscape so conveniently close to home.

The poverty of Wales also seems confirmed from the evidence of taxation, where very low assessments were common.[2] In 1691, the whole of Wales produced only £5700, of which an eighth came from the three shires of Gwynedd. Of the taxable wealth 55 per cent was to be found in the four shires of the southern coast, together with Breconshire. To place this in context, the southern counties appear less desperately poor than the northern, but they were still humble compared to English shires. Glamorgan was the richest county, with an assessment greater than the whole of Gwynedd; but even so, it was only equal to that of northern English shires like Northumberland. North Wales counties found their closest parallels in the wealth attributed not to English shires, but to individual cities like Exeter and Chester.

THE PASTORAL UPLANDS

There was an extensive satirical literature on the beggarly 'Taffy', remote in his mountain fastnesses, surviving on cheese and leeks, surrounded by goats and unpronounceable names. Confirmation of such an account came for instance from the land between Tregaron and Builth, 'for the most part pasture, mountainous, heathy, rocky, barren; but breeds great plenty of good sheep'.[3] Inventories even show the popularity of non-wheeled forms of transport like sleds and sleighs, necessitated by the lack of good road transport. The sparsely populated uplands were also areas of weak administration and control, as is suggested by the vast parishes that prevailed here. The average size of Wales' 850 parishes was roughly 6000 acres, but some were far larger than this. This table gives nineteenth century acreages, but the essential picture had changed little for centuries:

2. Sir Walter Scott, ed. *The Somers Collection of Tracts* (London 1809–1820), x, 596–597.

3. The account of agrarian life and rural society is derived from volumes four and five of Joan Thirsk, ed., *The agrarian history of England and Wales.*

Table 2:1   The Large Upland Parishes

County	Parish	Acres
Denbigh	Henllan	14,334
	Llanfair Talhaiarn	11,114
	Tir yr Abad Isaf	11,264
Merioneth	Llandrillo	28,200
Caernarvon	Beddgelert	26,716
	Llandegai	15,477
	Penmachno	13,000
Montgomery	Llangurig	50,000
Radnor	Llansantffraed	32,000
Glamorgan	Cadoxton juxta Neath	31,155
	Ystradyfodwg	24,515
Monmouth	Bedwellty	16,210
	Mynyddislwyn	15,938
Brecon	Merthyr Cynog	21,278
Cardigan	Caron	39,138
	Llanfihangel Geneu'r Glyn	30,136
	Llanbadarn Fawr	52,420
Carmarthen	Llanfair ar y Bryn	23,567
	Llandeilo Fawr	26,000
	Llangadog	23,472

This rather arbitrary list provides a remarkable picture. Three huge Cardiganshire parishes took up a total area of almost 190 square miles, while Llangurig covered almost 80. By the nineteenth century, some of these huge areas were experiencing rapid industrial and urban growth; but in earlier times they were little populated. In the 1560s, most such parishes had only 40 or 50 households, with perhaps 200 individuals. Llangurig had 60 households, Beddgelert 52, Llandegai only 32. Even in the nineteenth century, Llangadog had only 2600 people.

Trawsfynydd in Merionethshire suggests the economic implications of this barren and depopulated setting. This was a remote and desolate landscape, a parish that spread over 20 square miles, with only 70 households in 1563. Even in the twentieth century, it remained so desolate that it was felt to be an appropriate site for a nuclear power station. In the 1690s, a report on its economy found 'oats the grain generally sown, some rye and barley'.[4] There were 800 cattle, 2000 lambs, 100 goats and 100 horses. The people were 'used to hard labour and a milk diet'. Travel and communications

4. Joan Thirsk ed., *The agrarian history of England and Wales* (Cambridge 1967), iv, 116.

were appalling. Society was organised on comparatively simple lines, with few tradesmen or professionals, and no local residents who would qualify as gentlemen by English standards of wealth or standard of living. Settlements were usually isolated farmhouses, perhaps with occasional nucleated hamlets. In the severe winters which characterised the 1690s, snows might cause dramatic losses among sheep herds, which made agricultural survival even more tenuous.

LOWLAND COMMUNITIES

But Trawsfynydd was only one aspect of Wales, the extreme face of the stock-raising pastoral uplands. As we have already seen in the case of Ogmore, there was much else to the Welsh economy. In south Pembrokeshire, for example, we find the hundred of Castlemartin, noted by George Owen as yielding

> the best and finest grain and most abundance, a country of itself naturally fit and apt for corn, having lime, sand, weed of the sea, and divers other principal helps to better the soil, where need is; this country yieldeth the best wheat and the greatest store.[5]

Defoe found little good to say about much of Wales, but of south Pembrokeshire he remarked that 'this part is so pleasant and fertile and is so well cultivated that 'tis called by distinction, Little England, beyond Wales.'

There were several regions which bore closer resemblance to Castlemartin or Ogmore than to Trawsfynydd. Parishes here were likely to cover 3000 acres or less, markedly different from the upland communities of four or five times this size. Their geographical location provided them with relatively good communications – by road, but also by sea through the numerous small ports which dotted the coastline. There were areas of mixed agriculture like Anglesey, known as 'the Mother of Wales' for its wheat exports. Camden found in the Vale of Clwyd not merely green meadows and yellow cornfields but 'fair houses standing thick'. By the late seventeenth century, such areas were reporting an impressive mixture of products: wheat, barley, oats; plenty of bread and malting corn for local needs, and probably a surplus for sale; as well as peas and

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5. H. Owen ed., *George Owen's description of Pembrokeshire* (Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion 1892).

beans. No less than 14 of Wales' 60 market towns specialised in the sale of corn, including Brecon, Builth, Presteigne, Tenby and Denbigh. Land was often 'good for corn, pasture and hay', with excellent grazing for cattle and sheep.

In individual terms, the hill country might be symbolised by a man like David ap Griffith of Dolwyddelan (Caernarvonshire), who died about 1635. He left a solid inheritance of £40, mainly comprising herds of 28 cattle and 28 sheep as well as two horses. This was a typical upland inventory, and it contrasts sharply with the property of a Denbighshire contemporary like Magdalen Puleston of Gresford, whose goods (1606) included cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry and horses; but also rye, wheat, barley, oats, malt, vetches, peas, buckwheat and hemp.[6]

Against the sort of landscape and economy associated with Dolwyddelan or Llangurig, we might also consider a central Monmouthshire farm of *c.* 1700, that of William Prichard of Place Evor, which lay between Abergavenny and Monmouth. The property included 294 acres, distributed as follows[7]

Type of land	Percentage of farm
arable	60
pasture	20
meadow	7
woodland	8
apple orchards	3
clover	2

In southern Monmouthshire, there was a rich mixed agriculture based on fertile arable soils, and rich grazing, with meadows on reclaimed salt marshes.

Economic differences were reflected in demographic patterns. Average population density for Wales as a whole was about 40 per square mile in 1600, rising to 73 in 1801. However, richer mixed farming areas might have between 50 and 70 people per square mile in the seventeenth century. This was the figure for Castlemartin, and similar densities may be found in hundreds like Painscastle (Radnorshire), Dinas Powis (Glamorgan), Mold (Flintshire) or Creuddyn (Caernarvonshire). At the opposite extreme were upland

6. Thirsk, *Agrarian history*, iv, 132–139.
7. Joan Thirsk ed., *The agrarian history of England and Wales* (Cambridge 1984) v, 1, 413.

hundreds with 10 to 20 people per square mile. Such were Defynnog in Breconshire, Nantconwy in Caernarvonshire, Ardudwy in Merionethshire (the last of these contained Trawsfynydd).

RURAL SOCIETY

The sixteenth century marked a fundamental division in the legal and social structures which shaped rural life. In the middle ages, manorial farming had prevailed in parts of the south and border country, while a tribal-based land system could be found through much of Wales. In the latter, families shared common lands, but also had *cytir* rights which entitled them to a portion in pastures, woods and water. From the fifteenth century, parts of the clanlands increasingly fell into the sole possession of individuals and families. There was also a decline in the system of seasonal movement or transhumance. Summer settlements (*hafod* pl. *hafotai*) now became permanent residences, and there were encroachments on the hill pastures and open moorlands beyond. Demand for grazing land became acute as population grew in the sixteenth century, and the cattle trade developed in scale. The crises and depopulation of the fifteenth century had far-reaching effects in the manorial lowlands. As in the hills, land tended to become more widely available, and traditional structures were disrupted. Bond hamlets were broken up, demesne land was leased, villein holdings were abandoned.

From the early sixteenth century, there was a general movement to absolute possession on the English model, and the creation of substantial consolidated estates. This accelerated after the Acts of Union abolished *cyfran* (gavelkind), the partible inheritance of lands. Legislation could not entirely shape local practices, and we find gavelkind common well into the seventeenth century, in Builth, in Gower, even in manors around Monmouth and Abergavenny; but the trend was clear. Through purchase and exchange, enterprising landowners consolidated separated and hitherto uneconomic units, and were able to pass these holdings intact to their heirs. There was also extensive colonisation and settlement of new lands, in the barren uplands (*ffridd* land), as well as the fringes of the sea. *Ffridd* land that technically belonged to the lords became thoroughly confused with *cytir*, and was thus claimed by local freeholders.

Claiming new land could be regarded as socially useful work, but the century after 1560 also witnessed much conflict over the extent of

the nationwide assault on common land and waste. Much of the process went unrecorded, but the records of the Council in the Marches permit us an unusually detailed insight into the enclosure battles before 1640. Typical was the effort by a new gentry family, the Williams' of Llangibby, to seize common lands at Trefgrug in Monmouthshire, thus excluding some 800 freehold tenants. The war continued throughout the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, culminating in a gentry victory through the use of force in the 1620s. Such encroachments were regularly met with vigorous opposition, by riots that involved the destruction of fences and gates. This was especially likely when the encloser was a newcomer with not even the shadow of a claim on local obedience or sentiment. This was the background to the opposition to the enclosures by the Earl of Leicester in Denbighshire in the 1560s; and to the efforts of Thomas Myddelton to improve his new estate at Chirk after 1595.

In the early eighteenth century, Ellis Wynne summarised a long tradition of social criticism when he asked, 'What is the tailor who steals a piece of cloth besides the great man who, out of the mountain, steals the half of a parish?'. Enclosure was thus the most egregious of the many sins committed by the wealthy against the wider community:

> We remember hardly one estate not founded by some oppressor or murderer or arrant thief, leaving it to others as oppressive as themselves, or to lazy blockheads or drunken swine. And to maintain their prodigal pride, vassals and tenants must be crushed.[8]

But the process was more complex than might appear from the endless suits and petitions. Landed estates became bigger, and below them, so did the farms of their tenants. In lowland Monmouthshire or Glamorgan, a normal seventeenth century farm might be 30 to 50 acres, in contrast to a medieval villein holding of only 14 or so. In the uplands, farms of 40 to 100 acres were common. Such substantial holdings lent themselves to rationalised land use, and enclosed fields became common in the lowlands by the late sixteenth century. Enclosure and encroachment were thus the work of all classes, including cottagers. Especially in the upland regions, there was a strong tradition of *ty unnos*, by which cottagers established rights to common land by building a dwelling and lighting a fire in the span of a single night; and the practice remained common into Victorian

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8. Ellis Wynne, *The dream of the sleeping bard* translated by T.Gwynn Jones, (Gregynog Press, 1940), 134–135.

times. Obviously, some outrageous abuses were committed in the process of encroachment, but enclosure as such was not at fault.

TENURE

Historically, freehold tenures were common in Wales, especially in upland regions; but manorial survivals in the south meant that there were many copyholders in the more fertile regions of mixed agriculture. In the coastal plain, manors usually included a mixture of freeholders, copyholders and leaseholders. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, freeholders of manors owed dues that were broadly similar to those of copyholders. A farmer holding by 'socage tenure in perpetuity' would pay homage and fealty to the lord; he owed suit of court; and he would pay heriots of the best beast, apart from small money rents. Customary tenants would owe the same obligations, as well as fines on admission to tenure. They would have to grind at the lord's mill, and even owed labour services connected with the upkeep and repair of the mill.

This gives a rather archaic feel to documents portraying Welsh agriculture as late as the early nineteenth century. Under the Stuarts, the records of manorial courts and surveys almost suggest the conditions of the high middle ages, even to the survival of the ancient division between Welsh and Norman zones, the 'Welshry' and the 'fforenry' ('foreignry'); and this is as true of Monmouthshire as of west or north Wales. Squires held their position as manorial lords, often controlling several manors with their attendant courts and feudal structure. Individual manors also differed in their farming practices, and intense localism prevailed. One of the nightmares for the historian of the period is the very diverse nature of the weights and measures used throughout early modern Wales, where local equivalents of acres and bushels were used. In Monmouthshire, the old Welsh *cyfar* ('cover') was used to measure land into the eighteenth century.

From the seventeenth century at least, landlords attempted to transform customary tenures into leases, but these often incorporated many of the old dues. Leases specified for example that tenants would pay food rents, and even labour services. These were often commuted by the eighteenth century, but there is no doubt that they were far more than legal fictions when originally conceived. Some leases even require the payment of cymorthas, unofficial taxation

bordering on blatant extortion, that had been specifically forbidden by the Acts of Union.

Though essentially similar, copyhold tenure did not give the right to vote, and there was a great temptation for landlords to transform their tenures into leasehold when they needed an infusion of voters at the time of a contested election. In addition, customary tenants were not permitted to exploit minerals found under their lands. This posed a problem in areas such as Gower or east Carmarthenshire, where coal rights might be enormously profitable. For lords and their tenants, it was essential to defend manorial privileges, and there were constant battles to prevent encroachments on the commons by unauthorised making of bricks or burning of lime. The building of cottages was particularly contentious, as industrial enterprises attracted workers who found homes by squatting on common or waste land.

By the early seventeenth century, there was essentially a four-fold division in rural society. At the top of the pyramid were the gentry, the *uchelwyr*, of whom more in the next chapter. This class shaded imperceptibly into the yeomen, the better-off farmers whose main sphere of action and influence lay at the level of the parish. The great majority of the population were husbandmen, ordinary farmers; and beneath them were labourers and servants. There were also paupers, into whose ranks the husbandmen and labourers would fall on occasion.

These broad divisions were found throughout Wales, though as we might expect, regional distinctions were pronounced. In housing, the chief division was between the pastoral uplands and the regions of arable and mixed farming. There was also an east-west division, resulting from the relative strength of English influences; and of course, another factor was the availability of building materials. Two extremes might be cited. In the Vale of Glamorgan, the presence of fine building stone permitted the building of quite excellent limewashed rural cottages and farmhouses from the early seventeenth century, and the tradition often drew favourable remark from later travellers. A Glamorgan yeoman almost certainly lived in considerably greater comfort than many a gentle contemporary in a county like Cardiganshire or north Carmarthenshire, where the 'great rebuilding' in permanent materials can be dated to the railway age. In the central borderlands, meanwhile – in the counties of Montgomery or Brecon – half-timbered houses of great quality were commonplace.

IMPROVEMENT

Feudal survivals would often be accused of hindering agricultural progress. In stock-breeding, the practice of seizing the best beast naturally acted as a disincentive to improvement. But the archaic character of legal arrangements certainly did not imply that rural society in Wales was unusually primitive. As we will see, the rural economy was a complex affair with a strong market orientation, and Welsh agriculture was remarkably open to improvement, notably in the most traditionally 'manorial' areas of the south and borders. This resulted from the close economic ties with English regions in the south-west and west midlands. Practices were imported, became popular, and would be disseminated by landlords and their stewards. The great landed estates of the south were often headed by individual gentlemen who looked favourably on new methods, and they had the capital to indulge their enthusiasms. In the north too, there were progressive farmers like Henry Rowlands of Llanidan in Anglesey, who explored the new methods in the proposed book *Idea Agriculturae* (1704).

One problem throughout the period was the lack of winter fodder for the cattle who were so fundamental a part of the local economy. In Welsh, the month of November still bears the name *Tachwedd*, from the general 'slaughter' that occurred at that time. From the sixteenth century, it became common throughout south Wales to use lime as a fertiliser, which improved grazing, and permitted the use of new grasses. Denbighshire and Flintshire followed a little later. Clover was much used after the Restoration, while in the eighteenth century, the southern coastal counties experimented extensively with sown grasses like sainfoin and lucerne. Already in the mid-seventeenth century, Bristol imported its turnips from south Wales; but it would be another century before the crop entered common use, through the encouragement of the influential agricultural societies. The Breconshire society established in 1755 marked a major step towards the progressive restructuring of Welsh agriculture. It was turnips which provided the long-needed winter fodder. New grasses and rotations allowed improvements in arable farming, and south Wales became a significant corn exporter by the 1660s.

Progress can be measured in terms of the new crops, but more significant in the long run may have been the administrative and managerial changes of the century after 1660. Estate stewards often achieved a high degree of professionalism, and sought to improve estates by consolidating holdings, promoting larger farms, and by

27

encouraging the use of leases. They were aided in this by the stabilisation or decline of population, which promoted a concentration of landownership.

DEFENDING THE LAND

The enclosure of common lands also played some part in this era of improvement, but less so than in parts of England. The enclosure of much of the wealthier south had been undertaken before 1640, leaving little conflict for the eighteenth century. The acquisition of enclosed land benefited some estates; but for much of Wales, the real danger was that this new land would not be exceeded by the loss of other land to sea and sand. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this was largely a losing battle; and in the eighteenth, land reclamation and coastal defence were of great interest to the improvers. It is often easy to forget how vulnerable much of Wales was to coastal incursions. There were several regions where folk tales told of lost lands once overwhelmed by the sea: in Swansea Bay, off the northern coast, and most dramatically, in Cardigan Bay, where the tale was confirmed by sunken forests. As John Wesley observed, 'Nay, it is not at all improbable that formerly it was dry land from Aberystwyth to St David's Point'.[9]

Throughout the early modern period, frequent floods and incursions struck the lowlands, and thus the most prosperous areas. In 1607, southern Monmouthshire fell prey to a flood which devastated 26 parishes, and killed hundreds. Much further inland, heavy rains might also cause a river to flood, with lethal consequences. Less dramatic, but more harmful in the long run, was the regular invasion of sand and dunes in areas like south-western Anglesey, west Glamorgan and south Carmarthenshire. The ruins of the medieval borough of Kenfig were a striking monument to the danger that threatened if coastal defences were not maintained. We can only speculate about the impact that the battle with the sea may have had on the minds of men and women. At the least, it encouraged a continual sense of vulnerability to nature and providence, and discouraged any belief in the possibility of progress.

Reclamation and coastal defence were constant preoccupations from monastic times, but it was only in the eighteenth century that

9. A.H. Williams, ed., *John Wesley in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1971), 94.

decisive progress was made. In the north, the most visible triumph occurred in the old Traeth Mawr that separated the counties of Caernarvon and Merioneth; and where there now appeared a whole reclaimed landscape, centred on the new town of Tremadoc. At the end of the century, the coastal shipping routes were protected by the building of lighthouses, part of the same atmosphere of 'improvement', that had become almost a general ideology.

Further from the coasts, this was also the age in which the area of workable land was extended into what had once been inaccessible uplands. The high farm prices after 1793 provoked an enclosure boom, and the massive exploitation of marginal lands. This is the period that marks the rapid colonisation of the heartland:[10]

Table 2:2   The Process of Enclosure

Date	Number of Awards	Acreage enclosed (thousands)
1730–1792	18	35
1793–1815	85	213
1816–1845	26	12
1846–1885	102	121

Between 1793 and 1815, a minimum of 59,000 acres was enclosed in Montgomeryshire, 40,000 in Breconshire, 23,000 in Caernarvonshire, 20,000 in Cardiganshire. Though not as dramatic as the contemporary growth of industry, this expansion of inhabitable Wales was of enormous importance for rural society.

TRADE AND INDUSTRIES

Developments like these remind us that the Welsh countryside was not a complete backwater: this was in many ways a dynamic society. This is also indicated by the trading and commercial activities which linked local communities with major provincial towns. Welsh localities were increasingly integrated into the wider economy, with its structure of cash and credit. Industrial development began early, and contributed to making a diverse and powerful economy. Mineral

10. Colin Thomas, 'Colonization, enclosure and the rural landscape', *NLW Journal* 19 (1975) 132–146.

exploitation dated back to the middle ages, but accelerated sharply between 1560 and 1630. There were ironworks at Pontypool and Wrexham, brass and wire works at Tintern; coal was mined in Flintshire and west Glamorgan; slate quarried in Caernarvonshire; copper was smelted at Neath. Under James I, Hugh Myddelton emerged as the precursor of the Welsh industrialists of a later day, with his coal enterprises in the north-east, and his exploitation of the lead and silver of Cardiganshire. When reserves of timber began to be depleted, it was found that coal could be used for smelting most ores, with the important exception of iron; but that problem would be resolved after 1700. The enterprises were often tiny in scale, and some were ephemeral, but every region of Wales was affected to some extent. We will examine this in much greater detail in chapter eleven. At this point, we will just note that industrial development reached a new scale and sophistication under the later Stuarts.

TRADE AND SHIPPING

The commercial orientation of most of rural Wales is suggested by the extensive trading networks and the abundance of fairs and markets. In the Elizabethan period, there were over 240 fairs in Wales, and it was said that there was a fair somewhere in the country four days of each week. As so often appears, the south was much more prosperous and economically active, with almost 60 per cent of the fairs in the southern coastal shires, together with Cardigan. Northern fairs were fewer, but some (like Machynlleth) were very large, and served an enormous rural area. About 1600, the four counties of the south coast also had half the weekly market days.

The Welsh coasts were dotted with numerous small ports or creeks which participated in a lively trade with other regions of Wales, or with English towns. About 1780, Iolo Morganwg wrote of his home county of Glamorgan:

> There are many harbours on the coast, the most frequented are those of Rumney Bridge, Cardiff, Penarth, Sully, Barry, Aberthaw, Newton, Aberafan, Briton Ferry and Neath, Swansea, Port Eynon, Burry etc. Most of these places trade with Bristol etc and Swansea and Neath with London etc, and being so frequent on the coast afford a cheap conveyance of corn, coal, butter etc outwards and of whatever they want inwards.[11]

11. G.J. Williams, *Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff 1956), I, 30.

Aberthaw in particular had a substantial trade with Minehead. Pembrokeshire had famous ports at Pembroke, Tenby and Haver-fordwest. Between 1550 and 1750, there are records of coastal shipping using Fishguard, Newport, St Dogmaels, Abercastle, Dinas, Solva, and Porthclais. Milford Haven had 'sixteen creeks, five bays and thirteen roads'. Around Cardigan Bay, the coastal trade in the eighteenth century was felt to be so profitable as to justify the creation of a new planned town at Aberaeron. In Caernarvonshire too, ships could be found at a dozen locations besides Caernarvon itself. Shipping on the coastal routes was usually small, rarely over 40 tons. Anything over 100 tons was sufficiently noteworthy to be thought fit for ventures further afield, to France or Ireland.

Some of the ports had a specialised trade, but most carried the general produce of neighbouring farms for sale in some convenient town. In the south, this meant Bristol above all, and cattle and wool were the main items in the sixteenth century. Corn was a leading item of trade by the 1650s, reflecting the progress of agricultural improvement in the region. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these ships often carried dairy produce, notably butter and cheese, and Bristol continued to serve as a major market for Welsh farmers into Victorian times. In the north, Chester and Liverpool exercised a similar magnetic attraction for local enterprise until the railways ended these ancient coastal links.

Throughout Wales, the wool trade was of great importance from the middle ages into the early nineteenth century. From the fourteenth century, the technology of the water-wheel had been applied to power fulling mills. This use of water exploited a resource that Wales was known to possess in large quantity, and such mills (*pandy*, plural *pandai*) became common features in the landscape. The industry boomed, as a suitable activity for a society based on isolated homesteads, where every family member could participate in the process of production and preparation for sale. It was also crucial for fully exploiting the labour of girls and women. By the sixteenth century, there was an elaborate structure of spinners, weavers, dyers, fullers, tuckers and knitters.

At first, the wool trade was a southern speciality, but in the sixteenth century, the guilds of towns like Carmarthen attempted to dominate production. The industry thereupon moved to north and mid-Wales, to Merionethshire, Montgomeryshire and parts of Denbighshire. By the later sixteenth century, control of Welsh wool production was firmly in the hands of the drapers of Shrewsbury; and for the next two centuries, market day in that town would

resemble a Welsh invasion. The Huguenot settlement in the 1680s assisted the growth of industrial centres at Newtown, Llanidloes and Dolgellau. Some areas had their own specialities, like the stockings of Merionethshire, which found their outlet in the local market at Bala. Montgomeryshire was a flannel centre. The wool trade supported many local fairs and markets, as well as minor industrial centres like Caerphilly and Bridgend.

Apart from wool, the major trading activity of the Welsh interior was in livestock. Welsh horses were much sought after; but it was the activities of the cattle-drovers which brought the local economy what little cash it ever saw. In seventeenth century Caernarvonshire, the drovers brought 'the Spanish fleet of Wales, which brings hither the little gold and silver we have'. Northern drovers used routes through the Wrexham and Chester areas; mid-Wales herds crossed near Shrewsbury; the southern drove routes generally entered England through Herefordshire.

The drovers were able to use their access to a cash economy to act as moneylenders and bankers for the surrounding community. In Carmarthenshire and Breconshire, official banking activity from the end of the eighteenth century owed its origins to the activity of the drovers. This is neatly symbolised by the name of the Black Ox bank at Llandovery (1799). Hides provided the basis for a substantial leather industry in south Wales, in towns like Swansea, Cardiff and Brecon. In Tudor times, leather was much in demand for furniture, while saddles were a perennial product.

The archetypal inhabitant of Stuart Wales would be a hill farmer. Many thousands fitted this description, but the reality of Welsh society was much more complex. The range of agricultural activities was far wider than the emphasis on the pastoral zones might suggest; and there were other more specialised groups, like miners, quarrymen and workers in the smelting industries. There were drovers and sailors, weavers and drapers, tanners and saddlers, schoolmasters and alehouse keepers. Throughout Wales, there were also miscellaneous craftsmen like smiths, carpenters and masons, who would frequently be represented among the leaders of Welsh culture and religious dissent. A glance at the pages of the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* will soon produce numerous examples of the eighteenth or nineteenth century craftsman or drover who earned fame as a poet or preacher, often both. It was a Glamorgan stonemason named Edward Williams, *Iolo Morganwg*, who launched a revolution in the study of Welsh culture and antiquities.

An individual might become involved in several occupations during an average lifetime, and might either rise or fall in the process. One vital source for this is a remarkable and little used diary kept between 1762 and 1794 by a Glamorgan schoolmaster, William Thomas. He provided vignettes of hundreds of his plebeian contemporaries, and frequently describes careers which alternated between village craftsmanship, petty enterprise, and outright vagabondage. Some also had sidelines in preaching or (surprisingly often) magic and conjuring. How for example can we classify Thomas of Llanharry, who died in 1767

> a religious self-conceited man, walking here and there in fairs, exhorting people as a preacher in churchyards on Sunday evenings and about houses singing some scriptural songs of his own composing, of a very strong memory in scripture, but gave himself to a fugitive life, almost naked, working rough straw work, being but a slothful sort of a man.

A similarly varied career is recorded of Thomas Edwards (*Twm o'r Nant* 1739–1810), a celebrated author, promoter and actor in the dramatic 'interludes' that were so popular throughout late Georgian Wales. He earned money by these efforts, as well as by poems that were presented at the eisteddfodau of the 1790s; but he was anything but a full-time professional writer. By trade, Twm was a timber hauler and carter, but problems with debt caused him to flee his native Denbighshire for south Wales. While never giving up the hauling business, he ran a tollgate on one of the numerous turnpike roads, and built an alehouse to support his daughters. He became a stonemason, learned bricklaying, and ventured into the construction and upkeep of iron stoves and ovens; 'and not unfrequently I have practised as a smoke doctor'. About 1808, he was employed in the land reclamation projects around Portmadoc.

All social groups might well alternate between such activities and spells in farming. Well into the mid-nineteenth century, with a slate boom in progress, many Gwynedd quarrymen would take time off to maintain their smallholdings. It was also likely that many farmers and other workers would find themselves in need of poor relief during extreme crises like those of the mid-1690s, 1727–1731 or of 1739–1741. They thus became 'paupers' for at least part of their lives. There were also the chronic poor, abundant in the years of population expansion after 1540, less so by the eighteenth century. Even so, it is in the mid-eighteenth century that we hear of the *bobl gerdded*, the 'walking people', 'a set of vagabonds {who} used to traverse the country, begging with impunity to the disgrace of the

33

law of the land'.[12] In the 1670s, roughly a third of the population throughout Wales was regarded as too poor to be expected to pay the hearth tax; and were thus, at least technically, 'paupers'.

TOWNS

This was essentially a rural society. In 1550, there were at most four towns with 2000 people or more. Even by 1801, there were only 12 in this category, and the largest community in Wales had less than 8000 people.

In 1550, there were over 50 towns in Wales, but we reach this figure only by including communities with two or three hundred people. Using more exacting standards, we find only 12 towns with a thousand people or more, a small increase from the nine which met this criterion in 1400. The largest communities were Carmarthen, Wrexham, Brecon and Haverfordwest, all of which had lengthy histories and proud corporate traditions. Haverfordwest had eight guilds in the sixteenth century, including glovers, feltmakers, tailors and saddlers. Between 1569 and 1583, nine guilds incorporated in Carmarthen. All the towns were important as regional centres serving an agricultural hinterland. In Brecon, this pastoral environment reflected in the town's trades: in 1664, tanners, curriers and related crafts made up 37 per cent of the tradesmen, followed by tuckers, weavers and dyers (27 per cent). Denbigh had an abundance of tanners, corvisors and glovers.

There were perhaps another seven centres with 1000 or more people. These were Tenby, Swansea, Cardiff, Kidwelly, Monmouth, Caernarfon, and Denbigh. Of the 11 largest towns, seven were thus in the southern shires, and six of these relied on the Bristol Channel trade for their survival. We find another three in the far north. There were few centres in the heartland, which looked to the English midlands.

The fortunes of the towns fluctuated over time. By the mid-eighteenth century, the leading towns of Wales were still the four that had held this position in 1550, though their populations had now swelled somewhat to 3000 or so. In addition, new centres were challenging the old. Wrexham was displacing Denbigh, while

12. A.J. Johnes, *An essay on the causes which have produced dissent from the established Church in Wales* (London 1832).